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SENDING THE RIGHT SIGNALS TO THE ALLIES

Objectives

Although the general lines of President-elect Reagan's approach to our European and Canadian Allies are known, it will be important to convey early after the inauguration the following signals:

-- President Reagan is prepared to exert strong leadership within the Western Alliance.

-- NATO remains the keystone of our European policy.

-- President Reagan will wish to seek Allied views and will take consultation seriously.

-- The U.S. will stand with its Allies in this period of economic and political difficulties.

-- Commitment to December 12 decision on LRTNF.

How to Do It

Various options are available for sending the above signals including:

-- A short visit to NATO and the major European capitals early in the year.

-- A meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Ministerial level early in the year.

-- A combination of the above.

-- A Summit level meeting of the North Atlantic Council in the Spring.

-- A major speech on relations with the Allies.

-- A special meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Washington.

-- A Presidential press conference with the European press corps in Washington.

-- An early meeting (e.g. February) of the Special Consultative Group on LRTNF arms control.

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Assessment of the Options

European Journey

One of the most successful models of an effort along these lines was the February 1969 trip to Europe taken by President Nixon. Nixon made it clear that he had come to listen and that he was not proposing any great new initiatives. Nixon started off by addressing Permanent Representatives at the NATO Council in Brussels. He also saw the EC commissioners and the Belgian king. Following this important symbolic first step, Nixon went to London, Paris, Rome, and Bonn. His trip included a call on the Pope. By all accounts this journey was highly successful in convincing the Europeans of our dedication to the Alliance, our willingness to consult, and our determination to stand with the Europeans against the Soviet threat.

A possible disadvantage of such a trip early in 1981 is that the new Administration is unlikely to have a fully articulated foreign policy. However, by traveling early in his Administration the President cannot be expected to come up with new initiatives. At the same time he could stress the broad lines of his policy: a strong and united NATO; better consultations with the Allies; and an equitable arms control agreement with the USSR. He can make these points while at the same time making it clear that he came to Europe to seek the views of the Allies. We understand that the President-elect made an excellent impression on Chancellor Schmidt by doing just that -- asking intelligent questions and giving Schmidt an opportunity to talk.

Meeting of Foreign Ministers

An alternative or a follow-up to the above option, suggested by Genscher during the recent Schmidt visit, would be for the North Atlantic Council to meet early on at the Foreign Minister level. This meeting, for symbolic purposes, should take place at NATO headquarters in Brussels. It would accomplish many of the same objectives as the trip described above. The new Secretary of State could include in the agenda a Ministers-only session. This which would provide an opportunity for a free and unstructured session which would allow the Europeans to get their concerns off their chests and give the new Secretary a running start on developing personal links to his colleagues. Finally, it would also give him an opportunity to meet discreetly with his UK, FRG, and French colleagues in the quadripartite context.

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Summit Meeting

Genscher also mentioned that the President might wish to hold a summit meeting of the NATO Council in the Spring. This could be a possibility, but is rather late for conveying the kind of early signals that the new Administration desires. Also, it might conflict with the Ottawa Economic Summit scheduled for early July and a North-South Summit being discussed for June. Furthermore, it could debase the NATO summit of 1978, unless we can guarantee that it leads to solid substantive outcomes. The other difficulty with a Summit, as compared to a trip, is that it does not have the sustained media impact, both here and abroad, of a five day visit to Europe. Furthermore, the compressed format of a summit does not allow for the kind of tete-a-tete meetings with his counterparts that a new President needs to convey his message and to give the Europeans an opportunity to talk.

Other Options

Other options -- such as a major statement on relations with the Alliance, convoking a special NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Washington, or meeting with the European press corps -- would not convey as strongly the signals of U.S. interest and strong leadership as would a Presidential visit, or a foreign ministers meeting at NATO headquarters.

The Special Case of Canada

Prime Minister Trudeau has written Governor Reagan urging a visit to Canada "at the outset" of his term. The Canadian Ambassador told us that a visit at the time of the Ottawa Summit in July would be insufficient; Canada wants a 1-2 day State Visit like that planned by President Carter last December and cancelled because of the Iran crisis. The last Presidential visit to Canada was in 1972. Since then the Canadian Prime Minister has visited the U.S. six times. Given the importance of our relations with Canada and their delicate state at present, a visit by President Reagan early in his Administration would be a strong positive note which would benefit a wide range of US-Canadian relations.

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